DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 919 PS 029 147

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TITLE Pre-School Education in Lithuania: Historical Interpretation.
PUB DATE 2000-08-00
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the European Conference on Quality in Early Childhood Education (EECERA) (London, England, August 29-September 1, 2000). Summaries of the paper are provided in English, French, German, and Spanish.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; *Educational History; *Educational Practices; Foreign Countries; Historical Interpretation; *Kindergarten; *Preschool Education; Program Descriptions
IDENTIFIERS Historical Background; *Lithuania

ABSTRACT

During the 20th century, preschool education in Lithuania evolved within a context of a changing society, ideology, and politics, including the experience of national independence, two world wars, political exile and occupation, and regained independence. This paper demonstrates the connection between past and present preschool educational practices. It is noted that the birth of preschool education should be linked with the restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1918. The period 1918 to 1940 was marked by the establishment of kindergartens and the development of the preschool educational system. Although the majority of kindergartens were supported by government institutions, the system was highly dependent on private support. The main aim of the system was to develop a highly national self-consciousness in the child. During World War 2, some kindergartens were developed in refugee camps that were based on the work of Froebel and Montessori. During the Soviet occupation, preschool education was focused on collective activities led by adults. Following the restoration of independence in 1990, the following trends have been present: (1) decrease in the number of preschool institutions due to less demand for their use; (2) increased variety of institutions; (3) improved program quality; and (4) increased attempts toward decentralization of educational content. (KB)

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Pre-School Education in Lithuania:

Historical Interpretation

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SUMMARY During this century preschool education in Lithuania evolved in a realm of changing social, ideological and political aspects. Lithuania experienced independence, 2 World Wars, political exile and occupation, regained independence. This resulted in large changes in the quality and quantity of educational institutions. This historical review shows the connection between past and present preschool education practices; history demonstrates these parallels. Lithuania is now restructuring the preschool education system based on past historical events and selected European practices.

SOMMAIRE Le développement de la pédagogie préscolaire lituanienne du siècle actuel était déterminé par les circonstances sociales, idéologiques et politiques variables. La Lituanie a subi deux guerres mondiales, les déportations, les occupations. Après la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale la théorie et la pratique de l'éducation des enfants se sont retrouvées dans un carrefour et déterminées par les circonstances politiques objectives se développaient dans les conditions inhabituelles. Et notamment les circonstances susvisées ont déterminé les changements quantitatifs et qualitatifs des institutions d'instruction. Par le présent aperçu historique se révèle la relation entre le passé et le présent de pédagogie préscolaire: l'histoire

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présente les parallèles susdites. Actuellement au cours de la réformation du système entier de l'instruction préscolaire lituanienne en fait la référence à notre propre passé historique ainsi que les meilleurs exemples de la pratique européenne.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Die Entwicklung der litauischen Vorschulpädagogik beeinflüssten in diesem Jahrhundert wandeln die soziale, ideologische und politische Bedingungen. Litauen hat zwei Weltkriege, Verbannungen, Okkupationen erlebt. Nach dem II Weltkrieg geriet die Theorie und das Praktikum der Kinderpflege in die Klemme and entwickelte weiter unter den ungewöhnlichen Bedingungen. Verschiedene Voraussetzungen beurteilten quantitative und qualitative Veränderungen der Bildungsinstitutionen. Diese historische Übersicht zeigt die Verbindung der Vorschulpädagogik in der Vergangenheit und in der Gegenwart: die Geschichte demonstriert diese Parallelen.

In dieser Zeit, wenn litauische Vorschulbildunngsystem neugestaltet wird, beruft man sich auf eigene historische Erfahrung und auf gute Vorbilder des europäischen Praktikums.

RESUMEN. El desarrollo la pedagógica lituana en este siglo estaba determinado por las circunstancias sociales, ideológicas y políticas variables. La Lituania sufria dos guerras mundiales, deportaciones, ocupaciones. Después de la Secunda Guerra Mundial la teoria y la práctica de educación de los niños estaban en el cruce y determinado por las circunstancias políticas objetivas ellos se desarrollaban en las condiciones infrecuentes. Los cambios cuantitativos y cualitativos de las instituciones de instrucción son determinados por las circunstancias descritas. Por el presente resumen histórico se releva una relación entre el pasado y el presente de la pedagógica preescolar: la historia presente estos paralelos.

Actualmente, en el transcurso de reformación del sistema de instrucción preescolar lituano se referamos en nuestra experiencia histórica y los mejores ejemplos de practica europea

Introduction

1998 saw the 100th and 150th anniversaries of Lithuania and Lithuanian kindergartens, which stimulate us to review the development of both institutions. What has happened to Lithuanian kindergartens during the last century? What has changed in Lithuanian preschool education with respect to the development of the society, different social, ideological aspects and changing family patterns? It is important not only to review, but also to learn from the past examples, because history is full of analogous similarities and parallels.

The beginning of Lithuanian preschool education was influenced by historical circumstances which is why it is important to outline the following historical stages:

- at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century there was a national movement for political, economic and cultural independence in Lithuania
- 1918, February 16th restoration of independence which lasted until 1940 June 15th when Lithuania fell under the rule of the USSR
- 1940-1990 Soviet occupation
- 1944 mass immigration to western countries (to survive soviet deportations and repression)
- 1990 March 11th Proclamation of the restoration of the Independence of Lithuania

1. Circumstances of the birth of kindergartens in Lithuania

Taking into consideration all the political and cultural circumstances of the 19th – 20th century, kindergartens in Lithuania were established later than in some other western European countries. Lithuania was occupied by Russia (from the end of the 18th century) and by Germany (during World War I). Lithuanian culture and language were prohibited by the Russian Empire. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 20th century in the safe places and houses of learning it was possible to detect the early signs of kindergartens. According to different written sources, the first kindergartens were established in Klaipeda (German kindergarten, 1848), Kretinga (1898), Marijampole (1905) and Vilnius (1915), but we lack reliable information about their actual activities. Also, it is not possible to consider those accidentally established preschool institutions as the beginning of systematic work. Actually, the birth of preschool education should be linked with the restoration of Lithuanian restoration in 1918.

Despite that, at the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century, different questions like a child's psychology, socialization, etc started to be discussed in the press. Enlightened Lithuanians developed a new understanding of the child, the rich nature of its soul and individuality; refused to administer physical punishment; emphasized the necessity of taking into consideration the child's early biological, cultural and social requirements.

The principles of national education were about to be developed and implemented during this particular period of time. Scholars used local as well as international teaching experience. Some well-known principles became landmarks in the work of enlightened Lithuanians.

The second stage of preschool education in Lithuania is affected by changing political, social and cultural conditions as well as educational goals. Kindergartens were started to be considered as an important factor in the child's upbringing and parental pedagogical education. Also, kindergartens were considered to be significant institutions against the Russian Empire's denationalization politics.

2. Establishment of kindergartens and the development of preschool educational system in Lithuania in 1918 – 1940

The development of preschool educational system in Lithuania at this particular stage was intensive.

(Look in Figure 1, p. 15)

- rapid spread of kindergartens;
- building of nurseries, summer open-air kindergartens, libraries, kindergartens, etc;
- the development of new educational fundamentals, i.e. of language, literature, aesthetics, ecology, physical health, etc.;
- consideration of goals, principles and aims of child's preschool education;
- special systematic training of educators;
- first textbooks, books, etc.
- several Lithuanian educators were studying abroad and had close relations with famous schoolmasters (Sh. Buler, M. Montessorri), and took part in some international scientific conferences, etc.
- increased amount of periodicals with preschool educational information.

The main feature of this system at this time was tolerance of diversity. There were approximately 19 public organizations in Lithuania, which took care of children and their education until 1940. Kindergartens were based on the ideas and principles of:

- F. Frobel, O. Dekroly and M. Montessori pedagogical systems. These principles were approached creatively, not adopted mechanically;

- temporal kindergartens;

- kindergartens established and supported by different religious communities;

- kindergartens for cultural minorities. There were 56 Lithuanian, 15 Jewish, 5 Polish and 1 Russian kindergartens in Lithuania in 1934.

Despite the fact that the majority of kindergartens in Lithuania before WW II were legally and financially supported by government institutions (Ministry of Education, local authorities), still the whole preschool educational system was highly dependant on the support of private organizations and individuals.

The main aim of [illegible]chool education in Lithuania in 1918 – 1940 was to develop a highly national self-consciousness in the child. In order to maintain the State and culture it was of the key importance to develop and strengthen a child's national identity.

The WW II and the soviet occupation, which altogether lasted for 50 years (1940 1990), interrupted the activities towards the completion of preschool educational system in Lithuania. Those circumstances spoiled the development of preschool education and kindergartens system in that particular period of time.

3. Kindergartens in refugee camps in Germany, 1944 – 1949

In order to avoid the war, several thousand people moved to the west in 1944. Refugee camps were built all over Germany.

Leaving the country, people thought they would come back home soon. But reality forced them to adjust to changed conditions of life. In order to maintain Lithuanian culture, language and national identity abroad it was essential to establish Lithuanian educational institutions.

In 1944 the threat of Russian troops forced 12000 schoolchildren (that is 2500 from kindergartens) to move from Lithuania.

Kindergartens were the first educational institutions in refugee camps. It was necessary not only to take care of small children but also to prepare them to begin their studies at schools.

The first small Lithuanian refugee kindergarten was established in a wooden house in Dresden in autumn of 1944. According to the written sources, the biggest number of refugee preschool institutions was recorded in 1946 - 1947.

(Look in Table 1, p 16)

With some exceptions children aged from 2 to 6 were present in these refugee kindergartens. In 1945 there was a lack of primary schools in refugee camps, which led to kindergartens also being attended by some 14-year-old teenagers.

In independent Lithuania the pre-school educational system was based on the teaching, principles and ideas of F. Frobel and M. Montessori. Despite difficulties educators tried to continue using and developing these ideas in the refugee camps. For example a kindergarten in Ravensburg was based exclusively on the Montessori system. But in order to prepare children for school the majority of educators used their own methods, technique and means.

This particular stage of Lithuanian educational system evolution is very important. Despite extremely difficult conditions, Lithuanian intellectuals were able to create the unique system, which was based on the teaching in kindergartens. Children were taught to read, write, count, etc there.

After the war in soviet Lithuania preschool education had different goals, pace and was based on rather contradictory ideas.

4. Preschool education tendencies in soviet period

Soviet authorities nationalized all the 197 (with 6815 children) kindergartens in Lithuania in 1940. Together with changing political situation the attitude towards education was also changed.

The period after the war was marked by intensive industrialization and economic growth, but the social privileges for the family were minimal. Family was considered to play insignificant role in the child's education. After short maternity leave mother had to come back to work. In 1982 paid maternity leave was only 56 days. According to the law, mother couldn't remain a housewife or be unemployed because unemployment was punished as idleness. The result of that law was a growing demand for preschool institutions. Several new institutions appeared, i.e. nurseries, where kids were only supervised not educated.

Lithuania in 1960 – 1990 was one of the countries where the majority of small kids attended kindergartens. There were 1681 preschool education institutions in Lithuania in 1990.

(Look in Figure 2, p. 16)

During the early stages of Lithuanian soviet preschool system, the primary attention was drawn not to the content of education itself but mainly to quantitative aspects of kindergartens / nurseries development. In soviet kindergartens children were distributed strictly by the age and not by their mental or creative abilities.

All soviet preschool education was based on M. Krupskaja and A. Makarenko ideology. As they were against modern tendencies in pedagogics, the ideas of M. Montessori, F. Frobel and O. Dekroly were banned in Lithuania. The ideas of Montessori *et al* confronted the rational and empirical concepts of soviet pedagogics, which condemned individualistic education. The subject of kindergarten teaching was allocated by the age of the children. Programs indicated what exactly each member of a certain age group should know. The collective activities were of the highest importance and were led by the adult – educator. The

only one acceptable teaching method was academical and the form – the lesson. These methods helped to achieve the main goal of systematical education – accurate reproduction of knowledge without any trace of a person's individuality. From an early childhood children were taught to become "valuable members of international and collective society"

It is known that every historical moment has its own parallel, continuity and similarities. History repeated itself once again – after the occupation – a revival. If we compare teaching in the first period of independence and today, we can see some similarities; but however, the main difference now is that the whole educational process is faster, has more choice of method and is centralized.

5. New preschool educational system in Lithuania after the restoration of the independence

Teaching, which emphasized cultural values as a basis for modern education opposed soviet rational and empirical ideology in 1990. The development of preschool education in 1990 as well as in 1918 – 1940 was influenced by historical circumstances. Regained independence, changing values, and the political and economic situation encouraged change in preschool educational approaches.

Lithuanian kindergartens saw major changes when new a Education law, different amendments and other legislation were approved. In the 3rd Law of Education it is stated

"1. According to the parents or guardians wish their children may be educated in kindergartens or nurseries – schools. Orphans, waifs and strays are educated in special Homes.

2. The State supports the education of pre-school children at home and gives financial

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compensation, etc. Education and Health care bodies must provide methods, diagnostic and consultative help for these families, that educate their pre-school children at home"

The first priority of this educational system is the family. Preschool institutions act as competent advisors and attendance there is not compulsory.

The main reasons for changes in the pre-school educational system were because of the traditional Lithuanian awareness that the place for a small child is at home, and the bad reputation of former soviet kindergartens and nurseries.

After the approval of these new laws, attendance at preschool institutions dramatically decreased. The number of preschool institutions was:

1681 institutions in 1990,

748 institutions in 1994,

724 institutions in 1997.

On the other hand, the reduction of preschool institutions induced major changes in the quality of those institutions. Growing competition between the child's education in the family and in preschool institutions encouraged the creation of a modern and attractive educational system, which could meet the requirements of every child. The content of education was also changing.

Today's tendencies in pre-school education in Lithuania:

- growing demand for new institutions;
- growing demand for nurseries;

- increased variety of institutions. Today in Lithuania one can find nurseries, kindergartens, kindergartens – primary schools, preschool educational centers (for the children with different abilities). According to the parental wish there are different preschool groups for children aged 5 – 6 who have not attended classes, childhood learning centers, etc. Also, there are several guardianship groups for children from disfunctional families.

- an increased number of institutions take part in different national and international projects;

- expansion of preschool institutions duties;

- creation of appropriate conditions for supplementary education;

- increased ability for cultural minorities to learn the Lithuanian language;

- rapid integration of disabled children into society;

- increased attempts towards the decentralization of educational content. Despite the fact that the content is regulated by democratic, humanistic, national and civic principles it is possible to detect the high variety of methods and educational trends:

⇒ complex creative education (program "Verinėlis");

⇒ integrated education (program "Gaires");

⇒ M. Montessori;

⇒ R. Štainerio;

⇒ Individual programs.

Conclusions

It was easier to create a pre-school educational system at the beginning of 20th century, because the main goal was to restore the State and devastated culture and also it was possible to keep pace with all the modern ideas and achievements. It is both easy and difficult to radically change the soviet educational system, which was implanted for 50 years. It is easy because during the soviet period we lived isolated from the rest of the world, pedagogical tendencies and modern practices. Now we have to preserve our national identity as well as foreign experiences. Now we have to systemize all the knowledge and modern achievements. But it is difficult for educators, teachers, and others because they must decide for themselves where they want to go, what they want to do and how and what they want to achieve.

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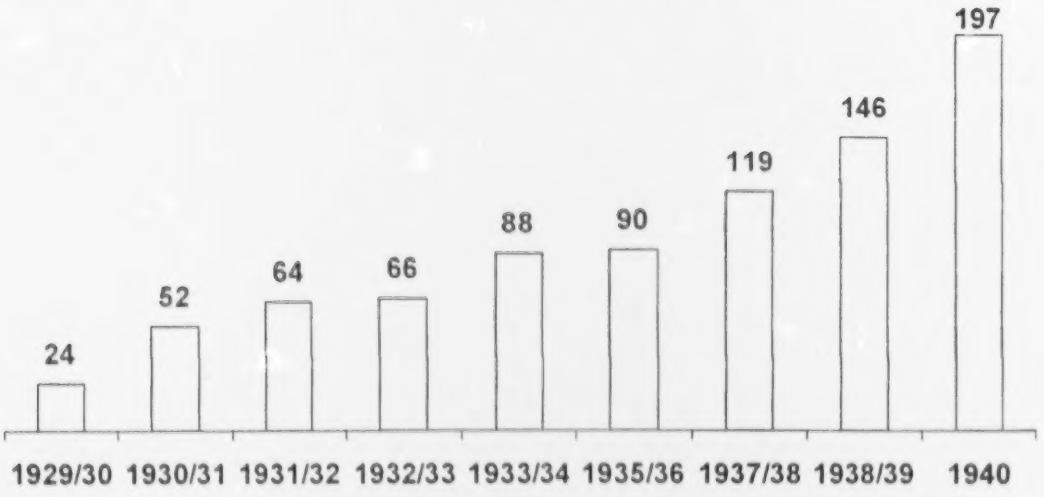

Figure 1. Growth of the number of kindergartens

Source: GRAŽIENĖ, V. (1998) Lietuvos vaikų darželio pedagogikos bruožai iki 1940 m. (Klaipeda), p. 45

Table 1. The number of kindergartens, educators and children in refugee camps

	1945-1946	1946-1947	1947-1948	1948-1949
Kindergartens	71	76	76	61
Educators	110	120	148	115
Children	2134	2513	2280	1935

Source: GUTAUSKAS, J. (1992) Krikscionybe Lietuvoje (Kaunas), p. 82.

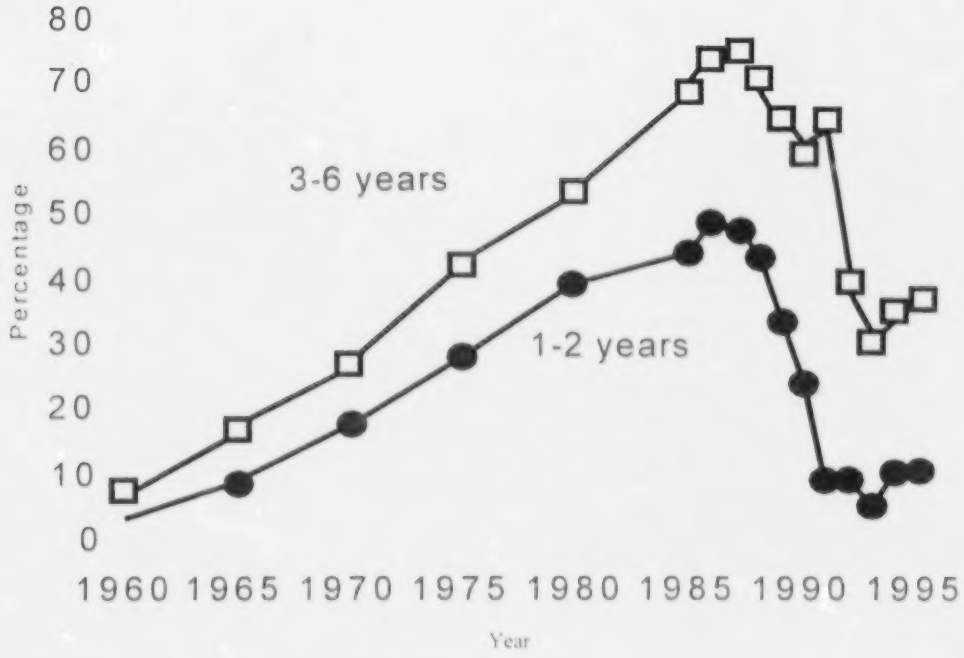

Figure 2. Attendance at preschool institutions in Lithuania

Source: STANKUNIENE, V. (1996) Vaiku ikimokyklinis ugdymas: pokyciai ir nuostatos, Socialiniai mokslai. Sociologija 3(7), p. 100.